



mcoleman117@hotmail.co.uk maristway.org

New world – new church

Father Colin asks Marists to find in the early Church a model for the Society of Mary. He doesn't mean that we turn the clock back and imitate the physical lives of the early Christians; but he does invite us to try to understand what took place at the beginning of Christianity. It could be put like this: a group of ordinary people from the world of their times gather together to remember Jesus, and form a communion of mind, heart, and love. This "community" was simply a gathering or a grouping, not a building or a structured group. And in that community of love – called a "church" – the Gospel was heard, transforming the lives of the people who then submerged themselves in their world, and began to transform it. So it was like a cycle: men and women from the world – gather in a communion – are transformed by the Gospel – submerge themselves in their world – and transform the world which becomes another communion where the Gospel is heard, and so on. The essential point is that the Gospels were written originally not for individuals, but for these "churches" or communities. Even today, if the Gospel is to be heard effectively, it is to be heard in the "community". So, the first requirement is to build a community of people who form "church". And since the world from which people come and to which they return is constantly changing, so will the shape and texture of the "church" constantly change.

The Society of Mary's origins lie precisely at a moment of extraordinary change in the history of Western civilization: the great cultural shift of the Enlightenment. The world in which men and women lived was evolving into something quite different: a world which no longer assumed that God had an intimate part in their lives; a world

which was jealous of its freedom and independence, and hypersensitive to any authority. At base, it was a world which was becoming more and more allergic to the Church as it was perceived, and Colin seemed to have an intuitive grasp of what was around him. Given his temperament, he could easily have joined those who saw this as the end of the world and the time for Divine Judgement. In fact, the remarkable thing is that he saw his age as a time of challenge to present the Gospel in a new way. He caught the wave without knowing on what part of the shore it might cast him. He realised that the work ahead is to begin a new "church" where the Gospel can be heard. The task is to enable "church" to happen in our day, because it is only then church happens that the Gospel can be proclaimed, heard, believed and inculturated.

September 27, 1846

Father Colin said: "The Society must begin a new Church over again. I do not mean that in a literal sense, that would be blasphemy. But still, in a certain sense, yes, we must begin a new Church. The Society of Mary, like the Church, began with simple, poorly educated men; but since then the Church has developed and encompassed everything. We too must gather together everyone through the Third Order. Heretics alone may not belong to it."

- *The Mayet Memoirs*

As if starting again

Colin did not mean that Marists were to construct "another church", but rather "a church

that is other”; not “a different church”, but “a church that is different”. One could say that he envisaged Marists as agents for the Church beginning again, being born again. Recent Popes have spoken about a “new Church.”

“It is a new humanity and a new Church which must be reborn from the maelstrom of our present times.” *Pius XI 1930*

“If we have our eyes fixed on Mary, we will be able to re-constitute in ourselves the line and the structure of the renewed Church.” *Paul VI 1973*

“The Church must be constructed in this present century... For us it is not a question of constructing the Church but of re-constructing it.” *Paul VI July 14, 1976*

“Our times require us to take up the building of the Church, almost psychologically and pastorally, as if starting again.” *John Paul II August 4, 1985*

“We must be prepared to leave atrophied schemes and be ready to move to where life is beginning.” *John Paul II September, 1985*

No antique drum

For last year’s words belong to last year’s language
And next year’s words await another voice.

We cannot revive old factions
We cannot restore old policies
Or follow an antique drum *T.S.Eliot.*
Little Gidding

An entirely new civilization has arisen, deeply secularised to the point that the very existence of God and His merciful call is for many people meaningless and irrelevant. The message of the Father must be preached again in a new language, in terms of a new culture. The incarnational movement of the Church is to start again in this new civilization. She must meet this new world on its own terms. This is how we must read today the call of our Founder: “The Society must begin a new Church over again.” New missionaries are needed, with a new approach, to manifest the mercy of the Father in such a way that it will be understood *Jan Snijders, sm*

Transformed Church

And the Church must be forever building, and always decaying, and always being restored....

- *T.S.Eliot – The Rock*

As Marists, we must dedicate ourselves to the more important and radical task of transforming the Church into a communion and a people....

Such a Church will demand a different form of leadership, one based not so much on hierarchy as on the ability to create an atmosphere in which people can recognize their gifts and have the courage to offer them for the task of the Kingdom.

John Jago, sm

Natural environment

In the natural world a loving God has designed each creature for the environment in which it is to live. There are fish that can thrive in the coldest waters and move easily through the most turbulent of rivers. The royal albatross can fly thousands of kilometres over gloomy and solitary oceans. God has designed Marists, too, for their environment, and our environment is a time characterised by unbelief, ignorance, confusion and sinfulness. Our Founder even said we were called to serve the most abandoned and the most profligate of sinners. That is our milieu, that is where we are at home.

- *Frank McKay, sm*

Where is the anchor?

Although most Western Europeans, if asked, would describe themselves as Christians, even Catholic Christians, they would also have to admit that Western Europe is increasingly secular. What that means is that people have developed the bad habit of dropping their anchor inside the boat of their own earthly resources, rather than outside the boat into the living waters and the rock that is Christ.